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### Hume Cook and Christian Yandell's Australian Fairy Tales 1925

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## Hume Cook and Christian Yandell's Australian Fairy Tales 1925

### Abstract

Hume Cook's *Australian Fairy Tales* of 1925 was the first book fully produced in Australia to bear that specific title. Its appearance followed on the passage of almost 30 years since the publication in London during 1897 of Frank Atha Westbury's similarly titled work, and Jessie Mary Whitfield's *The spirit of the bush fire and other Australian fairy tales* in Sydney the following year. There had been numerous stories about local fairies and other fantastical creatures written in Australia prior to 1925, including the Reverend Charles Marson's *Faery Stories* (Marson 1891) and the many small booklets, articles and monographs by artist Ida Rentoul Outhwaite and her sister Annie from 1903; and May Gibbs' fairy-like *Gumnut Babies* from 1916 (Gibbs 1916, Organ 2012). The dreaming stories of the Australian Aborigines were also adapted and labelled fairy tales or legends.

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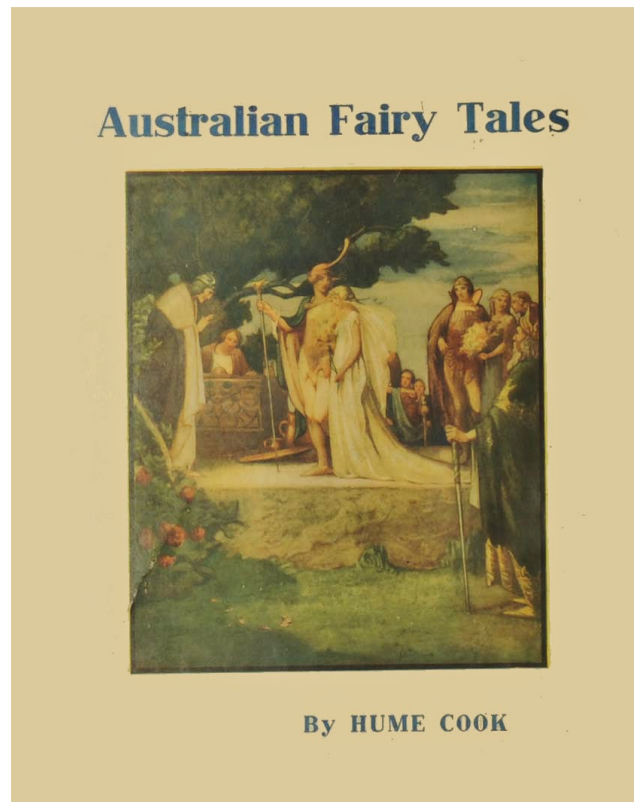
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# Hume Cook and Christian Yandell's Australian Fairy Tales 1925

Michael Organ, University of Wollongong



Hume Cook, *Australian Fairy Tales*, 1925. Dustjacket.

## An Australian fairy tale?

Hume Cook's *Australian Fairy Tales* of 1925 was the first book printed and published in Australia to bear that specific title. Its appearance followed on the passage of almost thirty years since the publication in London during 1897 of Frank Atha Westbury's similarly titled work, and Jessie Mary Whitfield's *The spirit of the bush fire and other Australian fairy tales* in Sydney the following year. There had been numerous stories about local fairies and other fantastical creatures written in Australia prior to 1925, including the many small booklets, articles and monographs by artist Ida Rentoul Outhwaite and her sister Annie from 1903, and May Gibbs' fairy-like Gumnut Babies from

1916 (Gibbs 1916, Organ 2012). The dreaming stories of the Australian Aborigines were also adapted and labelled fairy tales or legends. Those fairy tales which appeared at the end of the nineteenth century and during the early years of the twentieth were inspired by the Edwardian fairy fever sweeping the British Empire and following on the popularity of the Pre-Raphaelite movement of the 1860s which revitalised interest in medieval and Arthurian legend. Works such as Cook's *Australian Fairy Tales* adapted the British model to include Australian fairies, local landscape, flora and fauna, plus magical elements within a "once upon a time" world similar to, but different from, the realities of life (Do Rozario 2011).

Author James Newton Haxton Hume Cook (1866-1942) was a former Victorian politician who sat down every Sunday night and told his three children stories, or fairy tales (Hancock 2014). It was at the behest of one of the children that he filled a gap in the market by publishing a home-grown, truly Australian set of fairy tales. The book, when it appeared in April 1925, proudly boasted that it was written, illustrated and printed by Australians. It included a preface by former Prime Minister William Morris "Billy" Hughes, and exquisite drawings by young Melbourne artist Christian Yandell interspersed throughout.

*Australian Fairy Tales* is a rare book in many ways - the production values were high and it appeared in a relatively large format, with dust jacket, cloth bound and printed on quality paper. It was attractively illustrated with six tipped-in colour plates along with detailed black and white line engravings. The book sold for 15/- upon release, and the market was definitely to the wealthier sections of the community, rather than for a wider audience used to more cheaply produced works. Having never been reprinted, *Australian Fairy Tales* is now relatively scarce. It is little known and not subject to a body of discussion, though remaining a standard reference in most histories of Australian faery.

The book may have had its origin in bedtime stories told to the Hume Cook children, however the writing style is suited to an older, even adult audience. *Australian Fairy Tales* was published when the author was 59 years old and it reflects the fact that for much of his professional life Hume Cook engaged in political discussion and debate at the local, state and federal level in Australia. The language used is therefore rather stilted and formal. This was Hume Cook's first and only children's book, though he had published numerous political pamphlets and patriotic poems. He was also actively involved in the movement towards federation of the Australian colonies prior to 1901 and was an patriot and standard bearer for the locally-born, mens' only Australian Natives' Association.

*Australian Fairy Tales* appeared at the end of a period commencing in the 1880s when fairy stories and fairy tales were in vogue in England and throughout the British Empire. Australia's small coterie of immigrant and indigenous writers followed the Mother Country example and a few books appeared on the subject between 1897 and 1925, alongside those dealing with folklore, legend and Aboriginal dreaming stories. This was also the period of Federation and a new form of nationalism, with continuing allegiance to the Crown and the British heritage of the majority of the non-Aboriginal population dominating. The market for fairy stories and fantasy English in tone, though featuring local elements, was strong, having been reflected in the success of works such as Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, release in Australia during 1866 (Organ 2013). Some of those few fairy story books to be published in Australia and purporting to be Australian prior to Hume Cook include:

- 1891 - Reverend Charles Marson, *Faery Stories*, Adelaide.
- 1897 - Atha Westbury, *Australian Fairy Tales*, London, 357p. Illustrated by A.J. Johnson.
- 1898 - Jessie Mary Whitfield, *The spirit of the bush fire and other Australian fairy tales*, Sydney, 313p. Illustrated by G.W. Lambert.

- 1903 - Ida Rentoul Outhwaite, *The Fairies of Fern Gully*, Melbourne. This was the first of numerous fairy stories published by Outhwaite in magazines and books through to her death in 1960.
- 1904 - Olga Ernst, *Fairy Tales from the Land of the Wattle*, Melbourne.
- 1915 - Frank Wilmot and Ray Newmarch, *Here is Faery*, Melbourne, 112p. Illustrated by Percy Leason. Comprises seven poems and two plays.
- 1916 - May Gibbs, *Gumnut Babies*. Followed shortly thereafter in 1918 by *Snuggle Pot and Cuddle Pie*.
- 1919 - Minnie Rowe, *Gully Folk*, Melbourne.
- 1921 - Ethel Jackson Morris, *The white butterfly and other fairy tales*, Melbourne, 107p. Illustrated by E.J. Morris.
- 1924 - P. Harris, L. Yardley, G. Cock and E. Lawson, *The Pixie O'Harris Fairy Book*, Adelaide.
- 1925 - Hume Cook, *Australian Fairy Tales*, Melbourne, 140p. Illustrated by Christian Yandell.
- 1925 - Ethel English, *Australian Fairy Tales*, Sydney, 92p.

Brenda Niall, in her study *Australia through the looking glass: children's fiction 1830-1980*, points to the failure of the Reverend Charles Marson's landmark 1891 work *Faery Stories* due to the macabre nature of its content, the unhappy, punitive endings of its stories, and the work's limited availability (Niall 1984). Westbury's book, which appeared in London during 1897 was more successful and found a wider readership.

But what is a fairy tale, and what is an Australian fairy tale? There has, in recent years, been much debate and discussion over the precise definition of fairy tales, with some arguing that they are not derived from any oral tradition, whilst others define them merely as folk tales written down (Bottingheimer 2009, Bradford 2011, McCarron 2013). No consensus has been reached, though a

few generalisations are common throughout most discussions: fairy tales do not have to include fairies, but most commonly do; they usually have a happy ending; they are set in the past, with futuristic stories allocated to the category of fantasy; they usually involve not specific individuals and events, with a variety of characters such as kings, queens, prince and princesses, dwarves, trolls, fairies, talking animals and the like; and they are set in a magical world, often referred to as faery. J.R.R. Tolkien considered the problem of definitions and concluded that a fairy story is a story that abides in the world of magic and is an extension of the term fairy tale, which is primarily a story about fairies (Tolkien 1947 & 2008, Pu 2012). Whilst academics and folklorists anguish over precise definitions, the application of the label 'fairy tale' by the general community, including writers, artists and filmmakers, is broad, to say the least. For example, Aboriginal dreaming stories are commonly labelled fairy tales (Organ 1994, Ringland 2014), as are myths, legends, folktales and fantasy, leading one with the impression that a vast amount of fiction set in an "other" world, or the past, is faery. Of course this is not the case, but confusion over definitions can lead one down this path. In seeking to discuss and identify Australian fairy tales, it is complicated by these wider, international ambiguities. Like trying to catch a shadow, defining a fairy story is elusive.

Reilly McCarron, in the 'The Elusive Australian Fairy Tale', grapples with this issue, though no conclusions are reached (McCarron 2013). When the question is put by that author: "Does Australia have no real fairy tales and folklore of its own?" the answer, or answers, that come to mind are confusing. It could be argued that no, Australia does not have a folklore tradition of its own because there is no indigenous (non-Aboriginal) oral tradition of storytelling, due to the fact that white settlement did not occur until 1788. Of course Aboriginal society is the complete antithesis of this, with an oral storytelling tradition going back some 60,000 years. But Aboriginal story telling is not strictly folklore - it is societal, intimately integrated with learning, and a curriculum of life, whether

it be open or secret. This is not the case for most non-Aboriginal civilizations, including western, where stories are primarily ephemeral and entertaining, though they can also be historical and significant in the presentation of moral and ethical lessons. In addressing the question from the aspect of non-oral published stories, the answer is an emphatic yes, there are real Australian fairy tales, though they may be few in number and ill defined. Of course this then leads some to question whether they exist at all.

Despite this ambiguity over what is, and what is not, a fairy tale, there is no doubt that Hume Cook's work is what it says it is, i.e. Australian fairy tales. It is, in fact, both a single fairy tale and a collection of fairy stories. The setting is Australian, though the tone, language and tradition is English. This is also evident in Christian Yandell's artwork, wherein she presents the main characters in a medieval style, similar to the royal court of King Arthur, though with Australian flourishes. Yandell was influenced by the British Pre-Raphaelite artists who looked to the detailed art and craft of the Arthurian legends for inspiration. Her work for *Australian Fairy Tales* also drew inspiration from the fine line drawings of British artist Henry Justice Ford who illustrated many of the Andrew Lang series of coloured fairy books published between 1889-1910 (Hines 2010). Yandell's illustrations to *Australian Fairy Tales* were a perfect fit for the words of Hume Cook and the subject of faery.





Christian Yandell, Prince Waratah and his team of kingfishers, coloured plate, *Australian Fairy Tales*, 1925.

Whilst present-day audiences may baulk at the medieval / Pre-Raphaelite / Arthurian elements purporting to be local in *Australian Fairy Tales*, the contemporary reception for the book was generally warm and made no comment in regards to this disconnect or foreignness. This is seen through the numerous reviews appearing in capital city newspapers during the second half of 1925. Of course, a proportion of the Australian public at that time no longer saw themselves as British or felt connected with its history and heritage, and Hume Cook tried to accommodate this - and accommodate his children - by including as many specific Australian elements as he saw fit. So also did Yandell, though to a lesser degree. Unfortunately they were largely ephemeral and, as a result, it was the Gumnut Babies, Snuggle Pot and Cuddle Pie, Dot and the Kangaroo and later Blinky Bill who were adopted by the Australian public and applauded for their truly unique and local character. These works remain in print and are recognised as Australian literary classics, whilst *Australian Fairy Tales* has faded into obscurity. The fairies of the Outhwaite sisters, for example, suffered a somewhat similar fate, though they continue to be applauded for the artwork of Ida

rather than the story telling of Annie. Like Hume Cook's book, the Outhwaites' large body of work on Australian fairies is largely forgotten.

Faery is not totally forgotten, however, with Fiander and Bird pointing out that elements of fairy tales are to be found dispersed throughout modern Australian works of fiction, either by direct reference or as narrative devices (Fiander 2003, Bird 1998). These publications include engagement with the landscape - or "Country" as the local Aboriginal peoples know it - and an emphasis on the seeker-hero as a central figure. Australian fiction may have fairy tale elements, but the bland optimism of the traditional tale is often tempered by disappointment derived from the harsh realities of everyday life and, as a result, there is no "happily ever after."

Expatriated fairy tales, and fairy tales in general, were increasingly viewed as foreign by Australian parents during the twentieth century as links to the Empire faded, though children continued to express a connection with the world of faery. Peter Pan's Tinker Bell remains the definitive fairy, having come out of that Edwardian era in a 1904 play by J.M. Barrie, and been further promoted in the 1952 American Walt Disney film. Fairies live on - through television programs, cartoons, books, clothing and movies, though by and large they are generic and Australian fairy stories remain little known or applauded. The purchase of a classic fairy tales book in a local bookshop is unlikely to reveal to the Antipodean or Australian Native anything more than extracts from Grimm's Fairy Tales and stories such as Cinderella or Little Red Riding Hood. It is therefore interesting to look in some detail at the work of Hume Cook and the content of *Australian Fairy Tales*, both as an early example of an attempt to create local faery, and also as artefact of a past movement.

## **Synopsis**

The dust jacket *for Australian Fairy Tales* presents a full colour image of a regal marriage ceremony,

with a prince and princess in Arthurian garb about to take their vows. The book itself opens with a tipped-in colour plate of a prince flying a carriage pulled by a flock of bright blue kingfishers. It is facing a traditional cover page drawn by Christian Yandell and lithographically printed to reveal the details of the publication. This is followed by a dedication by the author Hume Cook, a preface by William Morris Hughes, and a table of contents. A brief introduction then refers to the author's three children and their pseudonyms Bidgybah (Keith), Pollykim (Madge) and Pinkles (Kervyn).

Chapter 1 - *The Magic Well* (1-34) : We are told that various fairy tribes are located throughout the continent (Austral Fairy Land) with the king of them all - King Waratah - and his queen living on an island (Fairy Island) in the middle of a large lake in the centre of Australia. On the lake is a magic well and much of the king's power derives from it. The fairies are human in all aspects. They are of small stature - riding ponies the size of sheep - and, as illustrated by Christian Yandell, their appearance brings to mind nothing less than the Forest Elves of Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* movie trilogy. Fairy Island is a subtropical oasis, and Australian in all aspects, including its indigenous plants and animals. Fairy tribes include the Mountain Fairies, Forest Fairies and River Fairies, to name but a few. The story is then told of when the king was but a prince and discovered the magic well. Prince Waratah, son of King Eucalyptus of the Forest Fairies, during his search for a bride, travelled throughout Australia, encountering groups such as the evil Desert Fairies whilst on route to the Wattle Fairies of the south (Victoria). It was at this point that he found, by accident, the magic well of the now dispersed Garden Fairies. Fed by the Truthful River, the water of the well had magical powers. The prince realised the potential use of this water in the middle of a desert and immediately returned home, told his father of the discovery and of his dream to build a city at the magic well. He then gathered together 2000 worker fairies and supplies to accompany him back to the site. All the material was carried by magical "fairy legs"- containers filled with electrical

energy extracted from the air and able to float. During their journey the Forest Fairies were attacked by the hot wind and sandstorms of the Desert Fairies, however Waratah used his friends the Shower Fairies to defeat them with water spray.

Chapter 2 - *The Fairy City* (35-52) : Upon arrival at the magic well, the Forest Fairies feasted and drank a toast from a fairy flagon made of gum leaves, ant milk and bees wax. It was soon discovered that the water from the well made one young, strong and active. The fairies then built an artificial lake around the base of the hill, with underground channels from the well to fill it, and a waratah-themed fountain over the well on the crest of the hill. When the lake was filled the immediate environment was transformed into a temperate rainforest, with a ring of eucalyptus around the base of the new island. Buildings were then erected for the city and roads were constructed, along with an encircling wall of granite and gates of bronze. There were four gates - Day, Night, Heaven and Earth - with numerous guard towers and electric arc searchlights located throughout the wall to protect the city. The layout was in some ways reminiscent of Canberra, with an orderly mix of four straight line axes emanating from the crest of the hill down to the gates, and numerous cross-cutting circular roads servicing the city.

Chapter 3 - *The Prince's Palace* (53-70) : A detailed description of the palace is given. It was double storey, of white marble with a reddish golden roof and located on the crest of the hill opposite the waratah fountain, for all the city to see. It contained a number of distinctive rooms, including a music room, a laughter room, and a Hall of Captive Sunbeams. When it was finished Prince Waratah asked his engineer to construct a flying carriage for him so that he could recommence his search for a bride. The carriage was made of bamboo, gumnuts and bees wax and pulled by 16 blue kingfishers. It was honey in colour and has a set of green coloured wings. Waratah then flew to the

land of the Wattle Fairies, where he was greeted by King Acacia and Queen Cootamundra. There he met and fell in love with Princess Wattle Blossom.

Chapter 4 - *The Prince's Marriage* (71-118) : Prince Waratah asked Princess Wattle Blossom to marry him. She accepted and their marriage ceremony was held at the prince's palace. All the guests travelled there by flying carriage. En route the princess was briefly kidnapped by a group of Desert fairies as she was collecting a posy of Sturt's Desert Pea. She is eventually rescued by the prince. They are married in the name of God at his palace and there follows a banquet, music, and the telling of fairy tales by five story tellers: 1. The Skylark's Story, 2. The Grape Vine's Story, 3. The Raindrop's Story, 4. Clover Perfume's Story and 5. The Music Story. After the fourth story is completed, King Eucalyptus and King Acacia rise and unexpectedly crown a new King Waratah and his Queen. Following the telling of the final story the fairy tale comes to an end and we are told that they lived happily ever after.

*The Moon's Garden Party* (119-140) : The final section of the book is an extended story in verse entitled the Moon's Garden Party, in which the Moon - queen of the sky - and the stars come down to earth in human form and engage in a garden party with the many plants and animals and the fairies of the earth, including their king and queen.

Fairy tribes mentioned throughout the book include the following - Cave (engineers), Desert, Forest, Garden, Mountain, Ocean, River, Shower, Wattle. Christian Yandell, in her drawings, in some instances labels the fairies differently to the author. For example, she refers to a Rain Fairy, a Water Fairy and a Flower Fairy, though these are not mentioned in the text.

The structure and content of *Australian Fairy Tales* is standard fare - a simple, noble tale and a love story about a prince and princess, defeating the evil Desert Fairies, ruling a kingdom and living

happily ever after. Waratah is lord of his wife and subjects. It is a very English scenario and in many ways a reflection of Empire and allegiance to King and Country which was so publically expressed during the passage of World War I (1914-18). It is a land of faery monarchs rule by divine right over a subservient populace. Of course such a hierarchical, class-based system was becoming increasingly irrelevant in Australia by the 1920s, with its population comprising, in part, descendants of convicts and Irish exiles who held little, if any, allegiance to the Crown. The experience of war and loss of loved ones soured those allegiances further amongst the wider population. This perhaps also explains why the world of princes and princesses, king and queens has not generally been taken up in local literature since that time, and the New South Wales Department of Education is able to provide a worksheet stating that Australian fairy tales do not exist. Nevertheless, *Australian Fairy Tales* has worth both as an artefact of Empire and as entertainment, with the final page leaving this author wanting to read more about the world and Waratah and Wattle Blossom.



Hume Cook, *Australian Fairy Tales*, J. Howlett-Ross, Melbourne, 1925.

## Contemporary reviews

A reading of contemporary reviews reveals not only details of *Australia Fairy Tales* and its creation, but also elements of its reception. The following anonymous, though glowing, review is from the *Adelaide Advertiser*, Saturday 18 April 1925:

### AUSTRALIAN FAIRY TALES.

"Australian Fairy Tales." By Hume Cook, with illustrations for Christian Yandell. Melbourne: J. Howlett Ross. Here is an ideal collection of fairy tales for young Australians. Written by an Australian, the stories are of real Australian Fairies. The handsome demy-quarto volume is illustrated in an artistic and fascinating way in bright colours by an Australian. It was published by an Australian, and the clear type in which it is printed was made and set by Australians, who also efficiently reproduced the charming pictures. An added zest is given to the book by the facts that the author has been an Australian legislator and that the foreword is from the pen of a former Australian Prime Minister [Billy Hughes].

Mr. Hume Cook in his preface explains that he was in the habit of telling a fairy tale to his three children each Sunday evening. On one occasion when the youngest child, aged five years, was about to be taken to bed, his sister remarked - "None of the books about fairies ever say a word about Australia. Are there any Australian fairies father?" The answer was, "Why, yes, of course! Whole tribes of them!"

Instantly the order was given. "Then you will please tell us about them the very next time you tell us a story." The mandate was obeyed, and the charming book is dedicated "To Keith, Madge, and Kervyn, whose appreciation encouraged the telling of the tales and prompted their publication."

The stories have been set down almost in the same words in which they were told, and they will now delight a much wider audience, for they are certain to become very popular. Mr. Hughes praises the researches of Mr. Cook, which enable everyone to wander through the enchanted bush with real Australian fairy princes and princesses, share in the thrills of their amazing adventures, rejoice in the triumph of virtue, and be glad at the downfall of vice.

"The dwellers in Australian fairyland," says Mr. Hughes, "although akin to those of other climes, have a distinct character of their own. Even the wicked Desert Fairies endear themselves to us. Although they do not vomit fire, as did the dreadful dragon of our childhood, one feels that, given a sporting chance, they would make that boastful beast give up like a salted snail. As for the other fairies, everybody will love them."

The children who listened to the original story - for it is a composite whole, though divided into chapters for the purpose of narration - are introduced by their fanciful domestic names of Bidgybah, Pollykim, and Pinkies. The narrative, which is told principally in smooth and simple prose, but here and there breaks into musical verse, begins right at the beginning, although the intimation is given that "in the heart of this fair island there's a wonder-working well, by the fairy-folk enchanted; for 'tis there the fairies dwell."

At the outset the idea is scouted that the heart of Australia is nothing but a sandy desert, and the fairies put in some useful propaganda concerning its beauty and fertility. Prince Waratah was sent out by his father to find a fairy wife, and during his travels he discovered the magic well, and the implements used by garden fairies. King Eucalyptus assented to his desire to take an army of working fairies thither to build the city of his dreams. The Desert Fairies attacked the labourers with a bombardment of sand, but the Shower Fairies with their rain drops routed them. Then the Prince



began the building of his city, which was adorned by fountains, lakes, streams, and gardens with flowers and fruits of every kind, which attracted birds, bees, butterflies, and all manner of beautiful creatures, and all round the lake in which the Fairy Island was situated was planted a great belt of splendid eucalyptus trees.

The city itself was of resplendent magnificence, and the palace of the Prince was marvellous in its beauty. His engineer also designed for him a winged chair, which was drawn through space by sixteen blue kingfishers. Then the Prince sought a wife and found her in the lovely Princess Wattle, the eldest daughter of Acacia and Queen Cootamundra. There follows the thrilling episode of the waylaying of the Princess by the Desert Fairies and her equally sensational rescue by the Prince, drawn swiftly through the air by the powerful kingfishers. The spectacular marriage is described with the true art of the imaginative fairy story and the narration closes with the poem of "The Moon's Garden Party," given to "the children of the sky, full of fun, but coy and shy."

All Australian children will give a hearty welcome to this "really, truly" Australian fairy tale, which is told with much of the affectionate and playful skill which has made "Alice in Wonderland" such a never-ending joy to young and old. How can Australia be self-contained if it has to cross the seas for its fairy people, with their haunts and palaces? The familiar environment, the indigenous fauna and flora, and the atmosphere of verisimilitude, which keeps within quite reasonable bounds, all help in the appeal of the stories, which, while amusing and fanciful tend to instil a love for Australia and everything within it. The spirit of the fantasies is admirable and the excellent full-page illustrations, rich in colour, as well as the line drawings, in their draughtsmanship, their imagery, and their artistry form most notable features in a particularly attractive book.

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Hume Cook, *Australian Fairy Tales*, J. Howlett-Ross, Melbourne, 1925. Light brown cloth, dark blue pictorial and titles to front cover only, 140pp, with six tipped-in coloured plates and numerous b&w full page illustrations by Christian Yandell. Originally issued with a dust jacket featuring one of the coloured plates. Muir 1767.

Another anonymous review appeared in the *Sunday Times*, Perth, of 26 April 1925, and reads as follows:

"AUSTRALIAN FAIRY TALES."

When all is said and done there is little variation in the old-world fairy stories which were in vogue half a century ago, therefore it is quite refreshing to come across a volume much more up to date. The book bearing the above title is from the pen of Mr. Hume Cook, a well-known Australian, while its illustrations are

the work of Christian Yandell (Mrs. Napier Waller). The stories are intended for children who have begun to think for themselves, and their purpose is not merely to "be interesting, but to convey to the reader a certain amount of information and moral instruction as well.

The foreword is by the ex-Prime Minister, Mr. W. M. Hughes, and his little contribution is not the least delightful in the book. In it he says: - "War and science between them have played havoc with the old order; ancient landmarks have been swept away; cherished superstitions exposed. The world has changed, but man remains the same. His faith in kings may have gone, but his belief in fairies remains. In childhood he lives to-day as he has lived throughout the ages in a world which knows not change, and where the cold, hard light of science can never penetrate. A wonderful world, inhabited by glorious beings with shimmering wings and glittering diadems and wands; to

whom nothing is impossible; for whom neither time nor space exist, save at their will. . . . It is the world in which the children of all the world live; the world of bogies and dragons, fairy princes and princesses, giants and giant killers. It is the world we know so well when we, too, walked with fearful joy amid its mystic, thrilling groves. . . . Hitherto the fairies we have known, though very delightful beings, have had their habitat in far-off lands. Thanks to the researches of Mr. Hume Cook, we are now able to wander through the enchanted bush with real Australian fairy princes and princesses; share in the thrills of their amazing adventures; rejoice in the triumph of virtue; and be glad at the downfall of vice. The dwellers in Australian Fairy Land, although akin to those of other climes, have a distinct character of their own. Even tho wicked fairies endear themselves to us. Although they do not vomit fire, as did the dreadful dragon of our childhood, one feels that, given a sporting chance, they would make that boastful beast curl up like a salted worm. As for the other fairies, everybody will love them." Our copy is from the publisher, J. Howlett Ross, Melbourne.

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### **Queen Mary's copy**

A copy of the book was dispatched to Queen Mary in England during May, and a report on her reply to the author, dated Buckingham Palace, 30 June 1925, was published in the *Brisbane Courier* of 15 August as follows:

"AUSTRALIAN FAIRY TALES."

Mr T. Hume Cook, 372 Flinders lane, Melbourne, the author of Australian Fairy Tales - has received from Sir Edward Wellington, treasurer to her Majesty Queen Mary, a letter conveying Her Majesty's grateful thanks for the copy of the book sent for her acceptance. The letter proceeds: "It gives her

Majesty great pleasure to possess this book and the Queen can fully realise how interesting it will be to the children of Australia."

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A more fulsome account in the Adelaide *Register* of 13 August included a copy of the letter:

In May last, Mr. J. Hume Cook, of Melbourne, sent for the acceptance of Her Majesty the Queen, a copy of his book, entitled "Australian Fairy Tales". The author is now in receipt of an acknowledgement from the Queen's treasurer (Sir Edward Wellington), through whose good office the book was presented. Sir Edward wrote from Buckingham Palace on June 30 as follows:-

"Dear Mr. Hume Cook:- I have laid your letter of May 24 and its enclosure before the Queen, and have received Her Majesty's commands to convey to you her grateful thanks for the copy of your book, "Australian Fairy Tales," which you have so kindly sent for the Queen's acceptance. It gives Her Majesty great pleasure to possess this book, and the Queen can fully realize how interesting it will be to the children of Australia."

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Mention of *Australian Fairy Tales* appeared in the Melbourne press during 1934 when a public campaign was got up to secure funding for a water well at the Hermannsburg Mission in Central Australia. Hume-Cook's offer to help was noted as follows in the Melbourne *Argus* of Monday 5 March 1934:

MR. J. HUME-COOK'S CONTRIBUTION

TO THE EDITOR OF THE ARGUS

Sir,-With others, I am glad to join in the effort to procure a water supply at Hermannsburg. And, since the first story in "Australian Fairy Tales" deals with the "Magic Well in Central Australia," I will contribute the proceeds from the sale - at 10/ each - of 12 autographed copies of that book. I should also be pleased to give one-half of the receipts from any further copies sold.-Yours, &c. J. HUME-COOK. March 3.

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The *Argus* on 7 December 1940, in a brief story on Australian books available for young children, noted that ""There are many other books for children, some newly written, some hardy perennials. Hume-Cook's "Australian Fairy Tales" are still selling, and make a delightful gift for younger children." No doubt by the early 1950s all available copies of Australian Fairy Tales had been sold, remaindered or taken off the shelves of bookstores around the country and it disappeared, apart from those copies publically available in lending libraries. It was not until many decades later that the book was discussed and reassessed. Marcie Muir, in her *History of Australian children's book illustration* (Muir 1982) referred only to Christian Yandell's "cold, static works" and made no mention of the writing of Hume Cook within her chapter on Fairies, though giving ample space to the works of Ida Rentoul Outhwaite. Brenda Niall is rather more critical of the work.....

### **Christian Yandell's drawings**

Christian Yandell (1894-1954) was a young Victorian artist with a prodigious talent for drawing which saw her gaining work in the field of book illustration during the 1920s and stain glass window design and production later in life (Thomas 1992). The illustrations in *Australian Fairy Tales* are some of her finest, and more refined than those seen in the 1926 publication *The Adventurous*

*Elves: An Authoritative Fairy Story* (Patten 1926). *Australian Fairy Tales* reproduces nineteen of Yandell's works, based on original drawings in black ink and watercolours. They are as follows:

- *The wedding of Prince Waratah and Princess Wattle Blossom*. Dust jacket, colour printed letterpress from process blocks. Also reproduced as tipped in plate #5 (refer below).
- *Australian Fairy Tales / Prince Waratah on his flying carriage / Hume Cook*. Cover engraving in blue ink on cloth. The image of Prince Waratah is a reverse monochrome of the tipped in colour plate #1 (refer below).
- *Prince Waratah on his flying carriage*. Tipped in colour plate #1, printed letterpress from process blocks. Facing the title page. Reproduced in reverse on the cover of the book (2).
- Title page. Black line engravings and fonts, letterpress print from blocks (3).
- *A Water Fairy*. Full page, black and white letterpress print from line block (11).
- *A Forest Fairy*. Full page, black and white letterpress print from line block (15).
- *"To his intense astonishment it came easily out of the ground."* Full page, black and white letterpress print from line block (19).
- *A Desert Fairy*. Full page, black and white letterpress print from line block (25).
- *"The Shower Fairies arrived and, with their pellet-like raindrops beat the sand particles down."* Tipped in colour plate #2, printed letterpress from process blocks (33).
- *"Instantly the fountain began to play."* Full page, black and white letterpress print from line block (43).
- *"To see the city at its best, it must be viewed at night."* Tipped in colour plate #3, colour printed letterpress from process blocks (49).
- *A Flower Fairy*. Full page, black and white letterpress print from line block (55).

- *"He vowed to himself that never in all his life had he seen anyone so gloriously beautiful and charming."* Full page, black and white letterpress print from line block (63).
- *"They suddenly rushed from their hiding places and started pushing and dragging her over the sandy desert."* Tipped in colour plate #4, printed letterpress from process blocks (75).
- *"Together they mounted the steps and stood before the 'Official Recorder.'"* Tipped in colour plate #5, printed letterpress from process blocks (85).
- *Touch tells a story.* Full page, black and white letterpress print from line block (89).
- *A Rain Fairy.* Full page, black and white letterpress print from line block (99).
- *"King Acacia placed upon his head a splendid crown."* Full page, black and white letterpress print from line block (113).
- *"They, the children of the sky..... to the Moon, their mother, came one happy summer night."* Full page, black and white letterpress print from line block (119).
- *"The Mower and his lady met the Queen."* Tipped in colour plate #6, printed letterpress from process blocks (131).

It is evident from these drawing that Yandell took much inspiration from the work of the British Pre-Raphaelite artists and Arthurian subjects as seen in the ink drawings of H.J. Ford. The high quality production values of *Australian Fairy Tales* meant that her many fine line drawings could be displaying in detail as a lithographic printing process was used for the black and white works. The colour plates were less successful. They lack detail, the colour is washed out and muted. They fail to reproduce the vibrancy of the original works in watercolour, as evidenced by extant works such as *Mythological scene*, 1923. This was due to the limited colour reproduction facilities available to the printer. and is the one major criticism of the production.



Christian Yandell, *Mythological scene*, gouache, 25 x 24.5 cm, 1923.

### **A long time ago.....**

*Australian Fairy Tales* remains a classic of the genre. Rare in numbers and equally rare in content, the combination of words by Hume Cook and art by Christian Yandell combine to produce a truly unique collection and a valuable addition to Australia's limited store of fairy tales. An artefact of a bygone era, *Australian Fairy Tales* makes use of standard fairy tale devices, in an Australian setting, to entertain a local audience. The fact that such Edwardian fare does not resonate with an expatriate, multicultural and post-Edwardian population is a mitigating factor in the success of the work and its place in the annals of Australian literature. It is a quaint, well-produced tale worthy of retelling, even if the subject of Australian fairies remains foreign. At the end of the day this does not matter, for children continue to be drawn to the fantastic and the dream-like, wherein fairies reside.



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